The Romantic Self-Saboteur: How Do People Sabotage Love?

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Introduction: There is a distinct lack of knowledge to explain why some people, having successfully initiated a relationship, embark upon a path to certain dissolution of that engagement. Research looking at self-sabotage provides some answers[1,2,3]. However, no measure exists to test self-sabotage in romantic relationships. This study investigated key self-sabotaging behaviours implemented in romantic relationships towards developing the Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale.

Methods: A total of 608 participants, aged between 17-80, from all over the globe, were recruited using an online survey. These included 156 males (26%) and 452 females (74%). Regarding sexual orientation, the majority of participants reported being heterosexual (486, 80%). Recruitment occurred via online sites such as the primary researcher's website and social media sites such as facebook and twitter; the APS research page; and fellow researchers' online pages. Additionally, the James Cook University SONA research participation system and snowballing techniques were used.

Results: A confirmatory factor analysis of an *a priori* hypothesis showed a good model fit for three factors (with a total of 12 items) contributing to one single construct ($\chi^2_{(39)} = 34.962$, $p = .655$; RMSEA < .001 [.001, .024], $p = 1$; SRMR = .0195; GFI = .990; TLI = 1; CFI = 1). Retained factors were defensiveness, trust difficulty, and relationship skill.

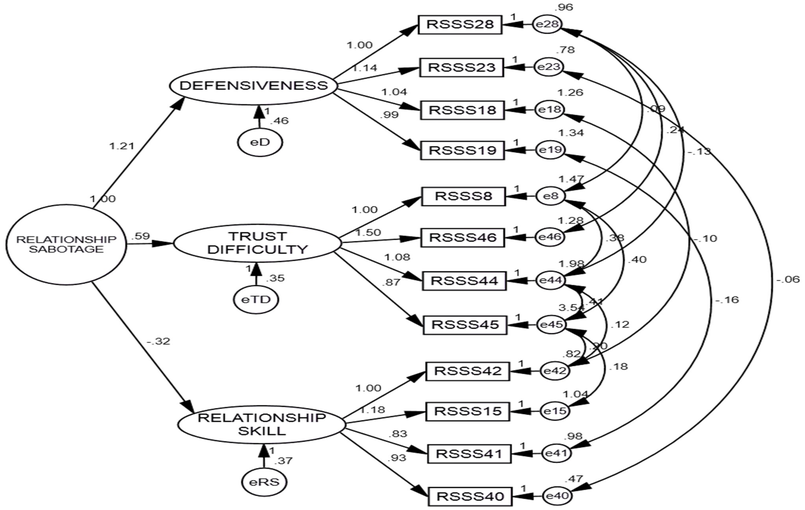
Conclusion: The newly developed scale was based on extensive theoretical investigations and stringent model re-specifications. The final retained model showed defensiveness as the stronger factor. Further, defensiveness and trust difficulty are contributing uniquely to relationship self-sabotage. However, the same is not true for relationship skill. Therefore, investigations should continue to improve the scale and build a theoretical model for predicting relationship self-sabotage.

The Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale

FACTORS	QUESTIONS
DEFENSIVENESS	**28. My partner makes me feel a lesser person.**
	23. I constantly feel criticized by my partner.
	27. I feel respected by my partner.
	18. I get blamed unfairly for issues in my relationship.
	22. I feel like I am always being tested in my relationships as to whether or not I am a good partner.
	25. I feel like my partner is ashamed of me.
	5. Fights with my partner often end with yelling and name calling.
	19. I often feel misunderstood by my partner.
TRUST DIFFICULTY	**8. I get upset about how much time my partner spends with their friends.**
	46. I do not always believe when my partner tells me where they have been or who they have been with.
	44. I often get jealous of my partner.
	43. I find it difficult to trust my romantic partners.
	11. I like to check if my partner still loves me.
	6. I like to know what my partner is doing when we are not together.
	45. I sometimes check my partner's social media profiles.
RELATIONSHIP SKILL	**42. I am open to my partner telling me about things I should do to improve our relationship.**
	26. When I notice that my partner is upset, I try to put myself in their shoes so I can understand where they are coming from.
	15. I like to discuss issues in the relationship with my partner.
	41. I will admit to my partner if I know I am wrong about something.
	40. I am open to finding solutions and working out issues in the relationship.
	4. I communicate well with my partner.
	7. I understand if my partner does not reply to my text or phone call straight away.
	10. I check-in with my partner after arguments to see if we are still ok.
	60. A successful relationship takes hard work and perseverance.
	57. I believe someday I will have a great romantic relationship with someone.

Results

Demographic Characteristics	M	SD
Age	32.30	13.76
Range (17 - 80 years)		
Longest Relationship Duration	8.63	10.56
Range (0 - 61 years)		
Relationship Quality	24.84	4.67
Range (8 - 30)		
	N	**Percentage (%)**
Gender		
Male	156	26
Female	452	74
Other	0	0
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	486	80
Homosexual	28	4.5
Bisexual	77	12.5
Other	12	2
Prefer not to answer	5	1
Relationship Status		
In a Relationship (Committed, Defacto, Married)	394	65
Not in a Relationship	214	35
Affair		
Yes	183	30
No	425	70
Seen a Psychologist for Relationship Issues		
Yes	210	34.5
No	398	65.5



Discussion

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Research looking at self-sabotage provides some answers for why some people cannot maintain romantic relationships. Defensiveness is the stronger factor contributing to relationship self-sabotage. This is in accordance with the understanding that self-sabotage is a strategy people use to protect themselves. Lack of trust is also a strong contributor. However, relationship skill shows high covariance with the other two factors. This finding possibly indicates that those high in defensiveness and trust difficulty lack relationship skill. Nevertheless, further investigations are needed.

WHERE TO NOW?

Recommendations for future research include testing a theoretical model for self-sabotage in relationships. More specifically, it is proposed that self-esteem might be a moderator for self-sabotage. Another consideration for a prediction model will be relationship beliefs, which is hypothesized to be a key indicator for how people behave in relationships[4]. Cultural differences are also expected to come into effect.

TAKE HOME MESSAGE

It is well known that motivation to form close affectional bonds with significant others is a strong human drive[5,6]. However, for those who are not successful in relationships, the drive for self-protection becomes the predominant motive.

References

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